



MALURUS LONGICAUDUS: Gould.

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# MALURUS LONGICAUDUS, *Gould.*

## Long-tailed Wren.

*Malurus longicaudus*, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 148.

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THIS species offers so general a resemblance to the Superb Warbler (*M. cyaneus*), that some ornithologists may still be inclined to consider it identical with that species; there are, however, differences in their characters which I find to be constant, and which are, I think, of sufficient importance to justify their being separated. The examination of great numbers of specimens enables me to affirm that the present species has the blue markings much more intense, is superior in size, and has a much longer tail. If the larger birds had been inhabitants of a warmer climate, where insect food is more abundant, it would have permitted the supposition that temperature had had some influence in effecting this difference; but as exactly the reverse is the case, I have been strengthened in my opinion of their being distinct, and have accordingly given it a name; that of *longicaudus* appearing to me the most appropriate, as at once distinguishing it from the *Malurus cyaneus*, in which that organ is much shorter. It is so universally dispersed over Van Diemen's Land, as well as the islands in Bass's Straits, that to particularize any one part of the former island where it is found more than another would be vain, since it is present in every gully, and every other place where low scrubby bushes and underwood are to be met with: I have also received a single specimen in its winter dress from Kangaroo Island, which I believe is referable to this species. Active and cheerful, and possessing a sweet warbling song, the present bird is as much a favourite in Van Diemen's Land as the Superb Warbler is in New South Wales, and, like its congener, in the winter season it is equally tame and familiar. It is subject to the same changes of plumage, and its whole economy is so similar as to render a separate description unnecessary. Its nest is also similarly constructed, but is rather of a larger size; it is usually composed of grasses and leaves warmly lined with feathers, and in some instances with the fur of the Kangaroo and Opossum; and placed either in a small bush near the ground, or artfully built in a tuft of grass. The season of reproduction commences in August and lasts until January, during which time two or three broods are reared. Like the *M. cyaneus*, it is also the foster-parent of the Bronze Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*). The eggs, which bear a similar character, but proportionately larger than those of the *M. cyaneus*, are four or five in number, of a flesh-white, blotched and spotted with markings of reddish brown, particularly at the larger end, where they form an irregular zone: they are nearly nine lines long by six and a quarter broad.

The long legs of this species admirably adapt it for the ground, and for traversing the fallen trunks of trees, along which, with tail erect, it passes with the utmost activity: it is also frequently to be observed among the low trees and bushes, the male often selecting a small prominent bare twig, whereon to perch and warble forth his animated song.

Its food consists of insects of various kinds, which are generally taken on the ground: the stomach is muscular, and was frequently found to contain grains of small sand intermingled with its natural food.

The male in summer has the crown of the head, ear-coverts and a broad lunar-shaped mark on the upper part of the back metallic blue; lores, line over the eye, occiput, scapularies, back, rump, and upper tail-coverts velvety black; throat and chest bluish black, bounded below by a band of velvety black; tail dark blue, indistinctly barred with a darker hue and finely tipped with white; wings brown; under surface buffy white, tinged with blue on the flanks; irides blackish brown; bill black; feet brown.

The female has the lores and a circle surrounding the eye reddish brown; upper surface, wings and tail brown; under surface brownish white; bill reddish brown; feet fleshy brown.

The figures are of the natural size.

The beautiful Creeper introduced into the Plate is the *Billardiera longiflora*.